

Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 6, 2023

**Senate Bill 1157: AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONCERNING EMPLOYEES OF PUBLIC AGENCIES
- Support**

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Latarsha Johnson and I am a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist in the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) with over nineteen years of service to the agency, and 24 years of service as a state employee. I offer the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 1157: An Act Concerning Revisions to the Freedom of Information Act Concerning Employees of Public Agencies:

I first would like to thank the committee for raising SB 1157. As someone who is an employee of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services this is a bill that is very important to me. I love working for the people of Connecticut, but I would never want that work to put myself, my family, or my co-workers at risk because someone abused the FOIA process.

While I was working, I once received a call from the security guard because there was a consumer waiting outside in front of my office and the consumer was there with her boyfriend. The security guard thought things looked suspicious and alerted me about the situation. It seems that the consumer looked up my office address and work hours, and went to the office with the intention of having her boyfriend assault me. The consumer could not assault me because she had a pending Department of Children and Families (DCF) case and was trying to regain custody of her child.

The consumer had a complicated DCF case and was angry because I did not get her placed into a job fast enough because getting her child back was dependent upon her finding a job. The process of placing a consumer into a job takes more than 60 days. I did not know anything about the DCF issues, and told the security guard that the consumer did not have an appointment. The security guard walked me to my car, and escorted me to and from my car for a month following this incident. At the time of the incident, the consumer had been off of her mental health medications.

Another case I had at BRS involved a consumer I was meeting on Zoom calls. I asked the consumer if she had any history of assaults and the consumer told me she did not. When I did a background check, I found out the claimant had been charged with four assaults that year. I asked the consumer why she had not been forthright about the assaults and the woman got very upset and I had to deescalate the situation during the Zoom call.

It ends up the claimant had been let go from two jobs because she had assaulted people at work. I explained that I would not be able to place her on a job site if she was going to hurt people. I let the consumer know

that she would not have any in person meetings, she would continue with zoom meetings. Soon after this discussion, the claimant assaulted someone at the temp agency that was trying to help her find work and the consumer was then incarcerated so the BRS case was closed. I do not have a security guard at home to escort me from my car, and I still think about what would happen if this person was able to get my residential address.

A co-worker of mine at BRS had a consumer look up her personal information online, found the name and age of her child, found her home address and threatened, "I know where you live and I can come get you and your family." The consumer also made reference to specific personal information regarding the child and the family. The consumer told the BRS vocational counselor "I can shoot you right through the big window in your office and you won't even know that I am there." There was a very large window at the office. The police investigated. The office started to close the blinds on the window so that it would not be evident from outside the window of the office if anyone was in the office or not. These threats are bad enough while we are at the office, I don't want anything to happen that would make it any easier for people to find out where my co-workers and I live.

While it is true that personal information can be found in places other than a FOIA release - as we all know, sometimes all it takes is an internet search - that should not be an excuse for the state to help facilitate the release of that information. The open and transparent operation of state agencies is essential to our democracy and at the foundation of the idea of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. However, that does not mean my home address needs to be accessible through a FOIA request. For my safety and security, as well as the safety and security of my family and co-workers, I urge you to support Senate Bill 1157.

Latarsha Johnson